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SUBJECT: USAID Acting Administrator Visit to Nyala, South Darfur

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 25, USAID Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham, Acting Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) Susan Reichle, and USAID Senior Policy Advisor Steven Pierce conducted a seven-hour visit to Nyala, South Darfur, as part of an October 24 to 27 visit to Sudan. The delegation was accompanied by USAID Mission Director William Hammink and USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Acting Country Representative Kate Farnsworth. The trip included meetings with the South Darfur Governor (Wali) and United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) officials, a visit to Otash IDP camp, a tour of UN World Food Programme (WFP) warehouses, as well as meetings with the Peace Council at Nyala University, and the Area Humanitarian Country Team (AHCT). End summary.

WALI - "SOUTH DARFUR IS SAFE"

¶2. (SBU) The security situation in South Darfur dominated discussions during the introductory meeting with the South Darfur Wali, Mr. Ali Mahmoud Mohamed, at the VIP Lounge of Nyala's airport. The Wali told the Acting Administrator that South Darfur is now safe due to successful peace and reconciliation conferences between different ethnic groups that the Government of Sudan (GOS) had facilitated. According to the Wali, current insecurity is primarily linked to fragmented armed opposition groups and banditry and security incidents had declined dramatically.

¶3. (SBU) When asked about government's intent to arrest and prosecute criminals engaging in car-jackings and kidnapping of aid workers, the Wali replied that the full measure of the courts will be applied when the guilty parties are detained. Mohamed lamented that even his own staff are victimized by these elements, describing a fatal ambush on a government convoy on the road to Kass in which one person died and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) State Minister of Agriculture was nearly killed. (Note: The State Minister of Agriculture for South Darfur has publicly accused National Congress Party (NCP) officials in South Darfur of arranging the attempt on his life in which he was injured and his bodyguard was killed. End note.) The Administrator stressed that impunity for criminals not only affects humanitarian work but also tarnishes the reputation of Sudan in the United States.

¶4. (SBU) The Wali impressed on the delegation that, with security restored in Darfur, the government is actively engaged in an IDP return program that includes a "package" of interventions in rural areas including community security, health, water, and schools. Further, he invited the Administrator to visit one of the model villages to see first-hand that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are actively returning home. The Wali admitted that it will take a

long time to restore South Darfur to normal after the last years of conflict. The Administrator pressed the Wali to comment on the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the returns process. With reluctance, and after some insistence by the USAID delegation, the Wali averred that IOM and UNHCR are now a part of the returns team and that "we have to make use of them." The Wali advised that the two organizations would be part of coordination meetings on voluntary return and that he would be looking to the organizations to support returns.

UNAMID ENGAGED IN SECURITY,
CONCERNED ABOUT ELECTIONS

¶5. (SBU) Proceeding to UNAMID headquarters for a meeting with the civilian staff of Sector 2 South, the Administrator received a more detailed briefing on security in the region. UNAMID Acting Officer-in-Charge and Humanitarian, Recovery, and Development Liaison Team Leader Landing Badji informed the group that some improvements in security had occurred since March 2009. Before March, approximately 50 vehicles had been hijacked, whereas since March only 5 had been taken successfully. (Note: USAID does not believe this is an accurate figure as three vehicles were carjacked during the week prior to the Administrator's visit, according to NGO staff. This figure also does not address that there are currently fewer NGO vehicles on the road in South Darfur than before March 5. End Note) UNAMID noted the likelihood that carjacking attempts will increase as elections approach.

¶6. (SBU) UNAMID also relayed the suspicion that security elements

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are involved in the carjackings, thus limiting the due process of law when arrests are made; criminals are often out on the streets after only a short period of detention. UNAMID stated that the government has ordered that off-duty police men no longer carry arms in an effort to reduce violent incidents, but it will be some time before significant change is felt. UNAMID has suffered many casualties in the course of their duties in Darfur, Badji reported. Now, UNAMID "means business" and, with full endorsement of UN Under-Secretary-General for Field Support Susana Malcorra who visited recently, will fight back with full force in self-defense when threatened.

¶7. (SBU) Asked how the IDPs view the election, the UNAMID civil affairs head highlighted IDPs' dilemma. First, the IDPs were excluded from the census, as were rebel-held "liberated areas." This omission affects the districting divisions in Darfur, which will impact the election. Under the voting rules, one must be resident in a location three months prior to the election in order to vote. IDPs are unlikely to want to vote in IDP camps, as IDP votes will not have a significant impact in the districts where most camps are located, typically in large towns with high pro-government constituents. Similarly, IDPs fear that if they vote as residents of a camp, they will compromise their future land claims in rural areas. At the same time, the current occupants in IDPs' rural areas of origin will vote in rural areas as residents, thus negating the displaced individuals' claims to those lands. South Darfur Area Humanitarian Country Team (AHCT) members and UNAMID predict increased insecurity as elections approach due to the uncertainty of IDP participation, and lack of political space for election activities.

¶8. (SBU) In addition, UNAMID noted that the GOS has not permitted armed opposition groups to register as political parties, further narrowing the electoral space. And perhaps most importantly, UNAMID representatives noted that a state of emergency still exists in Darfur, which permits the government to deny basic rights included in the National Election Law and required for campaigning, including freedom of assembly, expression, and press. UNAMID highlighted the point using the October arrests of 24 SPLM members in Nyala and Ed Daein for holding meetings related to next year's elections. As long as the GOS-mandated emergency situation prevails, the elections in Darfur are compromised even before beginning, UNAMID said.

ON TO OTASH CAMP

¶9. (SBU) From the UNAMID headquarters, the delegation traveled five kilometers to Otash IDP Camp, a camp first established in 2004 to accommodate 1,500 IDPs and today housing more than 70,000 residents.

The March 2009 expulsions of CARE, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), CHF International, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) severely affected health, nutrition, protection, and livelihoods activities in the camp. UNICEF, in coordination with GOS counterpart ministries, has intervened to continue providing water, while USAID/OFDA partner World Vision as well as the German NGO Humedica, the Kuwaiti Patient Helping Fund, and national NGO Rufida are working to provide health services. The Acting Administrator visited the USAID/OFDA-funded World Vision clinic and observed the array of services provided.

¶10. (SBU) In an animated meeting with IDP leaders, or sheikhs, in the presence of the South Darfur Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) representatives, the Administrator received a briefing on the needs of the camp, including education, health, sanitation, and food. The sheikhs complained that attracting teachers to the camp remains a challenge due to the cost of transportation between Nyala and the camp, as well as lack of available funding for teacher salaries. The schools lack benches and text books. The parents are contributing to pay an incentive to the teachers in lieu of salary to attract them to the camp, but this has not solved the problem. In addition, since the expulsion of IRC, access to hospital care is limited, as IRC previously paid hospital fees for the IDPs. Since IDPs cannot afford to pay hospital fees, they are forgoing transfers to the hospital. According to the sheikhs, a reduction in soap distributions has resulted in increased signs of skin disease. (Note: The USAID/OFDA health advisor notes that increases in skin disease are "soft indicators" of potentially larger problems to come. USAID/OFDA provided USD 2.0 million to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) for soap in Darfur in Fiscal Year 2009. End note.) The IDPs also complained that the current food ration comprises only 70 percent of the previously provided food basket and requested that the visitors press WFP to return the ration levels to 100 percent.

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¶11. (SBU) IDP women representatives interjected that the departure of CHF and the cessation of income generating activities has resulted in a loss of family income that helped to fill the gap in the humanitarian aid. In a side meeting with USAID/DCHA Acting Assistant Administrator Reichle, the women further explained that the CHF work had enabled them to meet and talk about women's issues outside the home environment, fostering a greater sense of independence and self-reliance. The women also noted that domestic violence remains a part of their lives and that the CHF women's centers offered a reprieve and shelter from violence at home, at least temporarily. HAC representatives listened and took notes throughout Reichle's meeting with the women.

THREE MONTHS' FOOD SUPPLY

¶12. (SBU) Moving from the camp, the Acting Administrator arrived at the WFP South Darfur warehouse. The sprawling, but organized, complex of Rubb Hall tents holds up to 39,000 metric tons, or three months worth of food for the area at any one time. The caseload for South Darfur varies from 806,000 beneficiaries during the post-harvest season to 1.2 million during the June-September hunger gap.

¶13. (SBU) In a tent filled with USAID bags of sorghum, the Acting Administrator received a briefing from WFP staff on the proposed new strategy to reduce the number of general food beneficiaries. Acutely aware of the growing dependency on food aid in Darfur, WFP has decided to seek opportunities to shift from general food distributions to a safety net approach, utilizing improved targeting, food and milling vouchers, and other interventions. The

Darfur Food Security Monitoring System, which tracks market and other data throughout the region, is serving to pinpoint where and when such interventions should be initiated. WFP acknowledged that the WFP food ration card remains one of the economic factors that discourage IDPs from leaving the IDP camps permanently.

FOSTERING GRASSROOTS PEACE

¶14. From the WFP warehouse, the group moved to the University of Nyala peace center, where USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) partner Academy for International Development (AED) had organized a meeting of students working for grassroots peace building under the guidance of the head of the peace center and chancellor of the university. The students noted their desire for unconditional peaceful co-existence of all ethnic groups in Darfur and asked for support to reach out to communities and other students to share the message. The administrator noted that the "Last Mile" USAID project, which introduces technology to connect various groups, might be useful in this context. The students relayed hopes to be involved in voter education and noted that a workshop held the previous week had revealed how little was known in South Darfur about the elections.

¶15. (U) The USAID delegation cleared this cable prior to departure.

WHITEHEAD